
Fifty years was enough; Sixty is much too much

April will mark the 60th anniversary of the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and activists throughout the world are already organizing activities to expose those institutions' role in the socially and environmentally destructive economic model being imposed on the world to favour Northern-based corporate interests (see <http://www.50years.org> for more information).

It is crystal clear that both institutions have failed to comply with their stated mandate. The WB states that its "mission is to fight poverty and improve the living standards of people in the developing world" and that it "provides loans, policy advice, technical assistance and knowledge sharing services to low and middle income countries to reduce poverty. The Bank promotes growth to create jobs and to empower poor people to take advantage of these opportunities." On its part, the IMF states the promotion of "high levels of employment" as being part of its mandate. What both have actually accomplished during the past 60 years is – among many other negative things- to dramatically increase the number of poor and to decrease the number of jobs.

It is difficult to find any single area where WB/IMF interventions have not resulted in social impoverishment and environmental damage and forests are by no means an exception. In fact, both institutions are at the root of most deforestation processes, in some cases directly funding projects that result in deforestation and in other cases imposing policies whose end-result is forest loss.

Perhaps the only difference between World Bank and IMF responsibility in deforestation is that while the former actually lends money to projects that will affect forests (such as logging, mining, dams, roads), the latter –in tandem with the former- imposes conditions on governments that make deforestation a necessary result.

The above is no news to forest activists and even less so to the World Bank, most of whose forestry staff is very clear about the role played by the Bank in this. Being the IMF a much more secretive institution, we don't even know if they acknowledge their major role in forest loss, particularly through the imposition of structural adjustment programmes.

It is no news either that both institutions are not only unwilling to introduce positive changes to their lending and policies, but that they appear to be less sensitive to criticism than in the past. The WB's forest policy review is a good example on this. After having failed to implement its 1991 forest policy –which at the time had been perceived as a step in the right direction- it simply approved a less stringent policy that allows the Bank to continue funding projects and policies leading to further deforestation. The impact of structural adjustment programmes on forests is not even taken into account by either the WB or the IMF.

No wonder then that when discussing the issue of the WB and IMF at the forest strategy meeting held in Mumbai during the World Social Forum, organizations present there decided that both institutions needed to be kept out of the forest. The relevant point was included in the "Mumbai Forest Initiative" (see <http://www.wrm.org.uy/statements/Mumbai.html>) and states: "Given the past and present record of the World Bank and other International Financial Institutions in the socio-

environmental degradation of forest areas, these institutions must have no role at all in forest policy formulation and forest-related projects.

Ten years ago, a large number of NGOs launched the "50 Years is Enough!" campaign focused on the negative role played by both institutions. It is now necessary to strengthen the current campaigning efforts, because if 50 years was enough, then clearly sixty is much too much!